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ABSTRACT

This question and answer booklet is designed to help parents and their children understand the importance of successful school entry and what happens in school. Questions include: How do I get my child into school? What is kindergarten like? How can I encourage school adjustment? What if my child is not eager to start school? How do I deal with my feelings? What can I do to help me feel more secure? Will school people understand the nontraditional family? What are general kindergarten program objectives? How will kindergarten meet my child's needs as a total person? How much structure will my child need after school? How do I create a good learning environment at home? Should I teach academics at home? Once school starts, how do I keep involved? What if my child will not talk about school? What should I do when my child is not feeling well? Who are school specialists and how can they help? Research findings have been incorporated into answers. The text lists physical, social, mental, and emotional characteristics for kindergarten children, as well as goals for development in these areas. Special sections of the booklet concern teaching children about safety and readiness for first grade. A list of suggested readings for children and parents is provided. (RH)

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OFF TO A GOOD START

As Your Child Enters Kindergarten

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Project Enlightenment, located in Raleigh, North Carolina, is a comprehensive mental health/educational program serving young children (birth to kindergarten age), their parents, teachers, and other child care givers. Administered through the Wake County Public School System and affiliated with Area Mental Health for Wake County, the Project has received local, state, and national recognition for its innovative approaches to prevention and early intervention, its effective service delivery system, and its positive influence in the community. Selected as a state model for early intervention, Project Enlightenment has also been selected as one of seven national models of preschool mental health programs by the Joint Information Service of the American Psychiatric Association and the National Association for Mental Health.

Major services of Project Enlightenment include consultation to day care and preschool teachers, parent education, family counseling, teacher training, a demonstration preschool, community consultation and education, services to high risk infants, a TALKline telephone consultation service, and a Parent-Teacher Resource Center. In existence since 1969, the Project includes a multi-disciplinary staff of early childhood educators, parent education workers, and psychologists. Interested persons are invited to visit or write for additional information.

OFF TO A GOOD START
As Your Child Enters Kindergarten

Rosalyn H. Alexander

Edited by Charles Kronberg and Val Wilson

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OFF TO A GOOD START

As Your Child Enters Kindergarten

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FOREWORD

Kindergarten is a child's first and probably most important experience in school. It is a time when children's experiences may well determine the direction of their future learning. Eagerness for learning can be either stimulated or stifled. Attitudes toward school can form in a positive or negative way. Interaction with others can become free and direct, or awkward and artificial. Future abstractions in all areas of learning can be made possible through acquisition of concrete, conceptual foundations or can be made almost impossible through the rote acquisition of abstractions at this age.

The first year of school focuses on the young child's experiences, strengths, and needs. The program for the child is based upon a firm understanding of human growth, development, and learning principles. These principles include the knowledge that a child learns as a total person (emotionally, socially, and physically, as well as intellectually).

It is the teacher's responsibility to create the environment and provide the activities appropriate for young children. These include physical activities, socio-emotional experiences, and stimulating intellectual pursuits.

The parent, more than any other adult, impacts upon the child's basic attitudes about self and about school. These attitudes are the single most accurate predictor of the child's success in the school environment. It is important for the child to begin the new venture called school with a genuine sense of excitement and anticipation. It is important that the child's entry into school be accomplished by the internal belief that he/she is a good person, capable of succeeding, worthy of trust, and capable of making decisions which affect personal learning. While there is not a predetermined formula for parents to use in assisting the development of such attitudes, we do know that certain practices are helpful.

Talk with the child frequently about things that are important to the child.

Listen to what the child has to say.

Plan outings together.

Read to the child on a daily basis.

Focus on concept development (it is more important for the child to understand the concept of "3" than to be able to write the numbers to 10).

Encourage the child's natural curiosity about people, places and the natural environment.

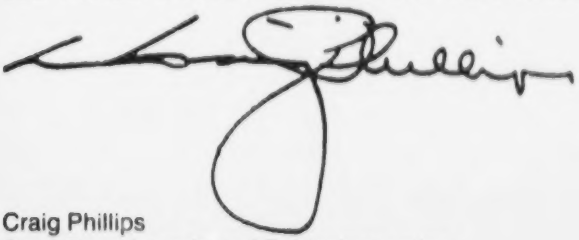
Encourage the development of personal responsibility and decision making.

Discuss school as a positive experience — something to look forward to.

Plan to be a part of the child's school experience.

Be an active learner. Let the child observe that learning is a pleasure for adults.

When the parents and teachers of young children work together to provide developmentally appropriate experience for the child in environments which provide love, care, encouragement, and support, we cannot help but succeed. The task is an exciting one and it is ours to accomplish together.



Craig Phillips
State Superintendent of Public Instruction
Raleigh, North Carolina

INTRODUCTION

Your child is now ready to put together all of the learning, growing, development, and experiences of the preschool years. It is extremely valuable if your child understands that school is a special place where each child is wanted and respected as a special person.

This booklet is designed to help you and your child understand the importance of successful school entry and develop a general understanding of what will happen in school. The more your child understands and can anticipate what will happen in school, the less upsetting the experience will be. As a parent you must be well informed so that you can relay a sense of confidence and security to your child.

There are no magic answers or magic "good starts." There does exist information that makes the transition from home to school go smoothly. The format of this booklet will address questions that parents ask as they prepare their children for the giant step into that special place called school. Keep in mind that no two children are exactly the same. Neither are any two kindergarten classrooms. The questions and responses are based on parent counseling and consultation experiences of Project Enlightenment's staff, along with information they have collected from various educational settings. Research findings have also been incorporated into the responses.

HOW DO I GET MY CHILD INTO SCHOOL?

Most schools have a registration period. Local newspapers carry announcements of the dates. Many are held in the spring and just prior to school opening in the fall. In North Carolina you will need:

- a certified copy of your child's birth certificate,
- a certificate of immunization (signed by your child's doctor),
- a completed medical examination form.

Many schools screen children to help establish their developmental levels in specific areas such as language, motor, cognitive, and social skills. Vision and hearing may also be screened. You may be asked some simple questions about your family and your child's experiences. These are intended to guide the teacher and school principal in understanding your child.

Requirements vary from state to state regarding kindergarten entry age, mandatory attendance and documents needed for enrollment. Check with local education administrators for specific details.

WHAT'S KINDERGARTEN LIKE?

No two kindergarten classes are exactly alike. A good kindergarten is a bright, happy, busy place. There are toys, books, educational materials, and, sometimes, pets in the classroom. The program must balance alternate periods of activity with rest. It must provide a variety of interesting materials to meet the needs of children with different capabilities and interests. Especially in the beginning of the year, the day should be divided into blocks of time long enough to accomplish program objectives but short enough for students to stay alert and attentive. Because kindergarten children typically have short attention spans and tire easily, the program should allow lots of opportunity for movement and time for rest.

In kindergarten, your child will learn to:

- express ideas and thoughts comfortably and appropriately,
- work alone or in small groups,
- take turns and share with other classmates,
- listen to and follow directions,
- expand abilities and interests and explore new ones,
- recognize and express feelings.

The activities in class are designed to:

- build your child's self confidence;
- introduce new ideas;
- increase interest in and awareness of people, numbers, books, and the environment;
- develop vocabulary;
- improve physical coordination;
- show differences in sound, size, shape, and color.

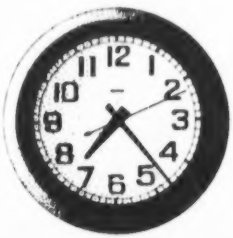
HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE SCHOOL ADJUSTMENT?

When parents show enthusiasm for what the school experience can mean, the child is more likely to look forward to going to school. Often, children will appear nervous about going to school. Show understanding and discuss his or her concerns openly. Treat going to school as something that is expected of your child and accepted by you as part of the normal course of events. Planning frequent visits with your child to the school building before school officially opens helps in school adjustment. Show your child the school, play areas and other key areas so he/she is familiar with them when school starts. Drive by the school building regularly. Predict how your child will react and be prepared to provide help and support as needed.

"Fashionably late" does not apply to kindergarten. It is important that children arrive at school on time so that they do not miss the introductory activities. Being late is often interruptive to the classroom routine and can make children feel left out or embarrassed.

Children need to understand what their school day will be like. Each school has a daily schedule which a child must learn to follow. You can prepare your child for daily structure by helping him/her develop a good sense of time and the ability to judge the amount of time an activity or task will take to complete. Predictable daily routines for dressing, eating, sleeping, playing, learning, and cleaning up teach young children that events occur in a time sequence. A predictable sequence of events each day gives young children a sense of control over their lives and allows them to anticipate what things are going to happen and when.

Most children can measure time by the length of a special TV show. A five-year-old who asks, "How long will it take?" will understand the parent who says, "The same amount of time 'Reading Rainbow' takes." Also having a simple daily schedule that lists routines, chores, and activities will help your child adjust to the school schedule.



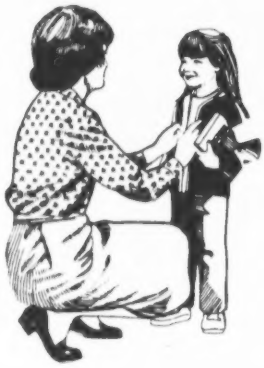
WHAT IF MY CHILD IS NOT EAGER TO START SCHOOL?

If your child does not seem eager to start school, encourage him/her to talk with you and share the worries. Many children have the mistaken idea that they should know how to count and read before going to school. Others worry that they will get into trouble if they are unable to follow all of the rules.

As your child expresses his/her doubts and worries, take them seriously. Try to answer all of the questions in a positive, reassuring manner. Stress with your child that there will be friendly people at school to help out as needed. Continue to talk about school in a realistic and positive way. It is important for your child to know what to expect at school, to feel that you have confidence in his/her ability to cope with school, and to be sure you are available to listen to any concerns.

HOW DO I DEAL WITH MY FEELINGS?

Children are not the only ones who have to make adjustments when school starts. It can be a big adjustment for parents, too. Some parents become nervous and depressed about sending their child off to school, especially if the child is the only child or the first child to go to school. While sending a child to school can create a strong sense of loss, it can also be an opportunity for growth and change. Parents can take time to set personal goals for the new found free time. Rather than feeling sad, some parents feel relieved or excited.



Parental feelings and reactions need not be conveyed to the child. Children could develop negative feelings about school if they feel a parent will miss them too much, or they may feel rejected by a parent who is relieved to have them at school finally. Parental feelings of loss or relief are quite natural. If you find your reactions troublesome, it could be helpful to talk with other parents who have had to deal with similar feelings or talk with a professional counselor to help sort out your feelings and concerns. Parents' reactions and attitudes go a long way toward determining how a child will feel about school.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP ME FEEL MORE SECURE?

Your attitude toward school and feeling that your child is safe and secure is a vital link in ensuring school adjustment. Before school starts, you may want to:

- visit the school and meet teachers — call the school in advance for details;
- learn the typical daily routine;
- talk with other parents whose children attend your child's school;
- arrange for an older sibling or neighborhood child to be a "special buddy" to your child while at school and for going to and from school.

Once school starts, be sure to:

- learn the names of the teachers who will be working with your child;
- learn the classroom policies about such matters as money, supplies, clothing, parent visits, and toys from home; (Most teachers send this information home during the first few weeks of school. If you need specific information beforehand, be sure to ask.)
- know the school calendar for holidays, workdays, etc.;
- learn the bus route;
- arrange a conference with the teacher as early as you feel you need to; (Make a written list of questions and concerns you want to discuss with the teacher.)
- learn when special activities such as gym, music, and library occur. (Post a schedule at home so that your child will know which days to expect these activities.)

WILL SCHOOL PEOPLE UNDERSTAND THE NON-TRADITIONAL FAMILY?

Family life has changed over the last few decades. Many children no longer live with two biological parents. They may live in single families, step families, blended families, adoptive families, or foster families. School personnel are well aware of the varying types of families. Most teachers may assume

children live with both biological parents unless told differently. Teachers need to know the basic facts about your family, but there is no need to discuss issues you feel are private and personal. If you are divorced, tell teachers how parent conferences and other school functions should be handled. A sensitive teacher, with accurate family information, can help children understand that all types of families are O.K.

WHAT ARE GENERAL KINDERGARTEN PROGRAM OBJECTIVES?

When kindergarten provides a happy, successful year in which children are permitted and encouraged to grow and develop in their own way at their own rate, a strong foundation is established for a favorable attitude toward learning. While no two kindergarten programs are identical, there are general program objectives that should be followed. These objectives should be:

- to provide situations in which children can succeed and, through success, build confidence in their own abilities and worth;
- to develop a feeling of adequacy through emphasis on independence and good work habits;
- to provide many opportunities for social development and adjustment to group living;
- to promote development of good health habits;
- to develop an atmosphere in which creativity is stimulated;
- to instill habits, appreciation, and attitudes which serve as standards of conduct in work and play and as guides to worthwhile use of time and materials in and out of school;
- to provide opportunties for self expression through language, music, art, and play experiences;
- to lay foundations for subject matter learning and intellectual growth.

The child learns through experiences. The goal of kindergarten is to plan and provide experiences with people, with events, and with materials. Experiences that nurture the child's physical, mental, social, and emotional development are the foundation which the first year of school provides and upon which the future years will be built.

HOW WILL KINDERGARTEN MEET THE NEEDS OF MY CHILD AS A TOTAL PERSON?

(The following section has been reprinted from a book, *Kindergarten in the 80's* by the North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction to help you look at developmental characterisitics and State level goals for kindergarten programs.)

CHARACTERISTICS AND GOALS RELATED TO FIVE-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN

Early childhood education is effective when it takes into account and provides adequately for the unique educational needs of young children. Specifically, these needs center upon the mental, emotional, physical, and social characteristics of young children.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

The kindergarten child:

- is quiet for only short periods of time;
- needs frequent change in activity;
- enjoys games with much movement, but fatigues easily;
- is at the age of marked susceptibility to communicable childhood diseases;
- has good motor control, though generally small muscle control is less developed than large muscle control;
- has usually developed hand, eye, and foot preference.

GOALS FOR PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

An environment conducive to the physical development and well being of kindergarten children provides opportunities for the child to:

- find acceptable outlets for tension and emotions;
- develop muscular control, coordination, and grace;
- enjoy being a participant in physical activities;
- develop a sense of rhythm;
- learn to care for his/her body and to value physical health;
- learn and practice rules of safety.

SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

The kindergarten child:

- functions more effectively in small groups than in large groups;
- is eager to assume definite responsibility on his/her level of maturity;
- is self-centered;
- enjoys talking;
- seeks companionship of other children, responds to group acceptance;
- needs adult direction in learning to share materials and taking turns.

GOALS FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

A kindergarten room in which democratic living is practiced will help the child to:

- understand his/her home and community;
- learn from the group;
- respect rules and understand the processes of ordered social relationships;
- share and take turns;
- practice politeness, thoughtfulness, and orderliness;
- solve his/her own problems;
- respect the rights and property of others;
- achieve an understanding of the fact that people are alike, as well as different.

MENTAL CHARACTERISTICS

The learning capacities of kindergarten children at mid-year range from below four years to approximately eight years. Generally, they:

- are active, eager, interested, and curious;
- are eager to learn, but most are not ready for formal abstract learning;
- are interested in stories and books;
- often confuse fantasy and reality;
- learn by experience — observing, questioning, imitating, examining, doing, exploring, and investigating;
- gain understandings of relationships through dramatic play, music, art, movement, and construction;
- tell rather long stories fairly well;
- like to draw objects and explain them in detail;
- demonstrate increasing skill in thinking things through;
- solve simple problems.

GOALS FOR MENTAL DEVELOPMENT

An environment that contributes to the mental growth and development will assist the kindergarten child to:

- expand his/her perception of the world;
- express him/herself orally;
- develop listening skills appropriate for differing activities;
- express his/her ideas clearly;
- express him/herself through dramatic play;
- increase his/her vocabulary;enjoy books and poetry;
- learn many songs, poems, and stories;
- follow instructions;
- increase his/her ability to plan and evaluate;
- develop perceptual discrimination, reasoning, and memory.

EMOTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

The kindergarten child:

- needs a sense of belonging;
- responds to praise, affection, encouragement, and consistent direction;
- searches for trust, fairness, and definite standards;
- gains a feeling of security from routine;
- needs to live in a reasonably predictable classroom situation;
- needs reasonable freedom.

GOALS FOR EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The kindergarten climate should provide a happy, realistic, interesting, and friendly environment for the child. Efforts are made to:

- help him/her accept guidance and authority;
- help him/her learn to live away from home and family;
- help him/her develop a sense of humor;
- help him/her discover and use socially acceptable behavior patterns;
- give him/her the opportunity to experience the joy and relaxation deriving from self-expression and physical activity;
- help him/her develop a positive self-image.

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HOW SHOULD MY CHILD DRESS?

The rule of thumb for dress is neat, clean, durable, easily laundered, and comfortable. Young children need to have names on personal items. Children need to feel that they belong and fit in with the other children. If most of the children wear jeans and sneakers and your child feels comfortable in these and wants to wear them, by all means let him/her. In cold weather, a layered approach is preferable to one bulky garment. Your child can shed clothing as needed.

HOW CAN I HELP MORNINGS MOVE SMOOTHLY?

Routines help mornings move smoothly. Set a morning schedule that works for your family. It is important that there be enough time to get everything done. It is sometimes tempting to let children "sleep-in," but in reality having more time works better. When mornings are rushed, it is hard not to have hassles. By kindergarten age, children should be taking increasing responsibility for themselves. If they have not already started, children can work on learning the following skills:

- getting up in the morning;
- choosing clothes;
- getting dressed;
- cleaning bodies, faces and hands;
- remembering homework, lunch money, books;
- helping to prepare lunches.

By the end of the kindergarten year, children will be able to do many of these things themselves.

It helps when children have their own alarm clock to use to get up on their own. Most kindergarten age children need 10-12 hours of sleep each night. A well-rested child is in a better position to be cooperative in the morning and alert throughout the school day. Young children may need help picking out school clothes; and, if this is done before going to bed, it can help the morning go more smoothly.

Develop a morning routine which includes dressing, breakfast, and hygiene. Allow enough time to get everything done. Remember, new routines and responsibilities require a settling-in period. During this time, children will test the limit by failing to follow responsibilities and may have to experience unpleasant consequences as a result. Remain consistent and firm. Do not give in to complaints or expressions of unhappiness. Your reward will be a more pleasant morning, and your children will be more self confident and able to take care of their own needs.

HOW MUCH STRUCTURE WILL MY CHILD NEED AFTER SCHOOL?

Now that your child spends more time in a structured school environment, you should allow more time at home for free play. When both parents work, good after-school care is essential for young children. The after-school setting should provide ample time for running and active play.

Often children who attend a full-day kindergarten are tired or "revved up" when they get home. A snack, some quiet time, or active playtime can help children adjust to their new schedule. As the year progresses, children get adjusted to the longer day and make the transition from school to another setting more easily. Because kindergarten is often enough structured activity for a child to handle, it is best to delay other organized activities such as music lessons, dance lessons, scouting, or organized sports until the child has completely adjusted to the school schedule.

Be aware of the amount of time your child spends viewing television. It is important to establish TV viewing rules at the beginning of the school year. When a young child views television more than one to two hours on a school day, there is little time for free play, reading, thinking, and quality time with the family.

HOW DO I CREATE A GOOD LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AT HOME?

Provide a designated study and work place for your child, equipped with paper, pencils, crayons, books, markers, tape, children's scissors, etc. This establishes the importance of school materials and the need for a defined place to work.

Set aside a quiet time daily. The younger the child, the more you will need to be involved in scheduling quiet time. Find time to sit and read and model for your child how valuable you think learning at home really is. In kindergarten, children are learning to understand order and recognize that there is a time and place for everything. You can help at home by establishing and sticking to routines and keeping a consistent schedule for events such as baths, bed, and breakfast. When so many things are new at school, consistency in the home is reassuring.

Read to your child often. Reading together not only stimulates a natural interest in learning, but also gives you quiet, nurturing, quality time with your child.

SHOULD I TEACH ACADEMICS AT HOME?

Parents are always a child's first teacher. The success a child experiences in school is directly related to the quality of the learning environment parents provide at home. The quality does not depend on the occupation, age, socioeconomic level, or educational status of the parent. What matters is what is actually done with the child.

Leave the formal teaching of academic skills to teachers. Intellectual development is much more than learning basic skills. It must include learning to think, communicating effectively and establishing good work habits. Providing your child with stimulating experiences at home and in the community and reinforcing their curiosity and interest in learning will help motivate them to get the most out of school and be successful.

ONCE SCHOOL STARTS HOW DO I KEEP INVOLVED?

Some schools have very extensive parent involvement programs through the PTA where parents are encouraged to help in many areas of the school. Other schools have less formal programs. Find out what your child's school offers.

As well as being involved with the school, it is important to stay involved with your child's teacher. Maintain contact with the teacher through written notes and reviewing your child's work. Early in the year, the teacher should schedule a parent- teacher conference with you to assess your child's adjustment to school. If you have questions or concerns at anytime before that, you can let your child's teacher know. Don't wait until a major problem develops. It is best that conferences be scheduled in advance as teachers need to be with the children during class time. Notes or brief exchanges of information are helpful ways to communicate questions or to provide information that the teacher needs to know about your child.

WHAT IF MY CHILD WILL NOT TALK ABOUT SCHOOL?

Be sure there is time to talk about school each day if your child wants to talk. Do not be upset if your child answers the question, "What did you do at school today?" with, "I played," or, "Nothing," and seems uninterested in talking about the school day. This is normal for kindergartners. Children usually will share feelings when it is important for them to do so.

Specific questions such as, "Who did you play with today on the playground?" or, "What did you build with the blocks?" may get a better response than general questions. Another way children may be more likely to share is if there is a sharing time each day. During this time, at dinner or before bedtime, each member of the household talks about the best and worst thing that happened during the day or something that they did that day. Some children may still not share readily. Respect their silence but let them know you are available to listen.

WHAT SHOULD I DO WHEN MY CHILD IS NOT FEELING WELL?

As kindergarten is an active and busy place and kindergarten-age children are growing rapidly, they need lots of rest. As they start school, children are susceptible to so many childhood diseases. It is important to teach them basic rules of hygiene, such as washing hands, covering their mouths for coughs and sneezes, and blowing their noses.

If every parent kept every child with a runny nose at home in the winter, schools would have to shut down. However, children who are contagious, running a fever, or too sick to participate at their regular level of activity, need to stay home. Usually, if children are fever-free for 24 hours, they can return to school, but it is always best to check with your doctor.

Sometimes sick children will cry and beg to go to school. Other children will try to resist going back to school even when they are healthy enough to do so. Parents need to judge when a child is ready to return to school.

Call the school and let them know when your child is sick. Send a note to the teacher when your child returns, explaining the reason for the absence. When children miss a lot of school, it can be helpful to ask the teacher for some work or activities the child can do at home.

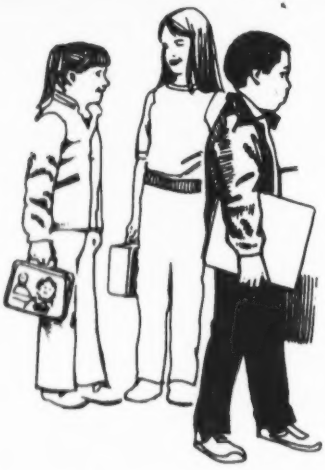
WHO ARE SCHOOL SPECIALISTS? HOW CAN THEY HELP?

Support staff varies from one school district to another. Most schools have at least some access to the following: school nurse, counselor, psychologist, social worker, reading teacher, special education teacher, hearing specialist, learning disability specialist, and speech and language therapist.

The knowledge and expertise of these specially trained professionals who provide support to the classroom teacher serve as valuable resources within the school. Kindergarten teachers in Wake County Schools have Teacher-Parent Consultants from Project Enlightenment who serve as additional resources. The appropriate specialist(s) can be most helpful if a child needs assistance due to one or more of the following concerns:

- strongly resists going to school or going into the classroom after the first month;
- mispronounces certain letters and words;
- has health problems, or needs medication during the day;
- seems upset and angry most of the time;
- has trouble making friends;
- has had a change in family life due to divorce, separation, or death;
- is not learning at expected rate;
- has difficulty learning in specific area.

School specialists usually welcome parent involvement. Keep in mind that the earlier a child experiencing difficulty receives help, the greater the chance for success.



SPECIAL SECTION: "OFF TO A SAFE START"

Teach your child about safety. As young children enter the new world of school, they come into contact with many new people and experiences. Often, they do not understand when they are in danger or are being taken advantage of. Safety to and from school must be taught.

Teach your children:

- their full names, addresses and phone numbers, their parents' last name, especially if different than theirs;
- never to go into anyone's home without your permission; (Children should know whose homes they are allowed to enter.)
- to walk with and play with others; (A child is most vulnerable when alone. If your child walks to school, have him/her walk with other children.)
- that adults do not usually ask children for directions; (If someone should stop in a car asking for directions or to give them things, the child should not go near the car.)
- that if someone is following them they should go to a place where there are other people or to a neighbor's home or into a store; (They should ask for help. They should not try to hide behind bushes.)

- never to go near a car with someone in it or get into a car without your permission; (Children should know in whose car they are allowed to ride. Warn your child that someone might try to get them into a car by saying you said to give them a ride. Tell them never to obey such instructions.)
- never to tell anyone over the phone that they are home alone;
- to tell you if any adult or older child asks them to keep a "secret;"
- never to answer the door when home alone; (Teach your child the emergency assistance number — 911.)
- to yell, "Help", if they are in trouble, not just to scream.

As parents, you should:

- know your children's friends;
- never leave children unattended; never leave children alone in a car;
- be involved in your children's activities;
- listen when your child tells you he/she does not want to be with someone; there may be a reason you should know about; ask;
- be sensitive to changes in your child's behavior or attitudes; (Encourage open communication. Never belittle any fear or concern your child may express to you.)
- tell your child to ask for help immediately from a trusted adult if he/she feels threatened or in danger, even if this involves only another child.

SPECIAL SECTION: READINESS FOR FIRST GRADE

Readiness is that stage in a child's physical, mental, emotional, and social development when that child is able to handle given learning experiences with ease, understanding, and interest.

Knowing that your child will have to manage certain academic tasks in first grade, your child's teacher watches, as the kindergarten year ends, for signs that he/she is ready for the expected tasks. Children show that they are ready if they:

- have good physical health;
- can work with a pencil and show increased coordination;
- have made a good adjustment to school and understand the daily routines;
- can work independently some of the time;
- can work, without social or emotional difficulty, in small groups with other children and adults;
- have developed vocabulary enough to help plan, discuss, and share experiences; can listen attentively for more than just a few minutes;
- can listen and carry out instructions and assume some responsibility for them;
- are independent of home and parents enough to enter whole-heartedly into school activities.

Not every kindergartener exhibits all of these achievements by the close of the year. Most exhibit many of them and are considered ready to move to first grade.

If your child's teacher feels that he/she is not ready to move to first grade, work closely with the teacher to understand the concerns. They should be based on: the teacher's professional skills and training in the area of childhood development; his/her work with your child during the year; and daily observation of your child as he/she compares in the class setting with children of the same age.

CONCLUSION

HOW DO I REALLY GET OFF TO A GOOD START?

Feel good about your child's beginning school experience and convey that attitude to your child.

Build competencies by letting your child do more and more things independently. Teach your child how to take care of basic needs. Make your child feel confident, important and needed.

Help your child learn about friendliness, courtesy, and acts of kindness by modeling them at home. These are usually not taught as well as they are modeled. Encourage your child to make friends and develop good social skills.

Work closely with your child's teacher and school personnel to alleviate concerns. Get to know your child's teacher. Teachers are very special people in young children's lives.

Arrange conferences with the teacher when you feel they are needed. This is a time for exchange of information, feelings, and concerns.

Learn how parents can be involved in the school. Serve as room parent, a PTA member and officer, or a class or school volunteer. The involvement can keep you in touch with your child's school life.

Relax. Enjoy the year! Parents are a very vital link in the education process. Nobody expects parents to know it all, do it all, say it all, or be perfect. You, your child and the teacher all have the same goal in common — the best education possible for your child. We are all learning together.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Listed below are books which parents can read to children to help them get ready for school as well as books for parents to read about issues relating to early education, child development and school readiness.

BOOKS TO HELP CHILDREN GET READY

Berenstain, Stanley and Berenstain, Jan, The Berenstain Bears Go to School. New York: Random House, 1978.

Cohen, Merriam and Hoban, Lillian. Will I Have a Friend? New York: McMillan Publishing Co., 1967.

Hamilton-Merritt, My First Days at School. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985.

Simon, Norma, I'm Busy Too. Chicago: Albert Whitman & Co., 1982.

Yashima, Taro, Crow Boy. New York: Viking Press, 1955.

BOOKS FOR PARENTS

Albert, Linda, Coping With Kids and School. New York: E. P. Sutton, 1984.

Ames, Louise B., Is Your Child in the Wrong Grade? Lumberville, PA: Modern Learning Press, 1966.

Ames, Louise B. and Ilg, Frances L., Your Five Year Old — Sunny and Serene. New York: Delacorte Press, 1979.

Elkind, David, The Hurried Child. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1981.

Moore, Raymond S. and Moore, Dorothy N., Better Late Than Early. New York: Reader's Digest Press, 1975.

This booklet is one of a continuing series of booklets of interest to parents and teachers of young children. Please write Project Enlightenment for a list of topics in this series or for information about other Project publications.